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AMERICA/PANAMA - The celebrations for the 500 years of the foundation of the first American diocese

Panama City (Agenzia Fides) - The Primate Archbishop of Santo Domingo, Cardinal Nicolas de Jesus Lopez Rodriguez, presided on Sunday, May 13 the celebration for the 42nd Eucharistic Meeting of Panama, as the initial part of the celebrations for the anniversary of 500th anniversary of the foundation in this country, of the first diocese in the American continent, with the name of "Santa Maria la Antigua". The celebration of the Mass, in the Rommel Fernandez Stadium in the capital, where thousands of faithful Catholics gathered united by the slogan "With Mary walking in hope", was also attended by the Archbishop of Panama, His Exc. Mgr. José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta, O.S.A., and the Apostolic Nuncio, His Exc. Mgr. Andrés Carrascosa Coso, and some members of the Panamanian Episcopal Conference.
During his homily, Cardinal Lopez Rodriguez recalled how the first diocese was established, in Panamanian territory, and noted that the festivities will extend throughout next year. According to the note sent to Fides, the Cardinal also stressed that "Latin America is a region with a rich culture that allows the approach of the people, leaving aside the suffering experienced". Speaking of the evangelization of the Americas, he also said that the faith of this region is always accompanied by the devotion to the Virgin Mary.
The Archbishop of Panama, Monsignor José Domingo Ulloa, in his speech to more than 20 thousand faithful who filled the stadium, asked politicians "not to act with moral ambiguity, as there should be no double moral" inviting everyone to promote and allow the culture of participation to grow and sincere dialogue, always with respect to the other.
The city of Santa Maria de la Antigua, which is in the forest area of the province of Darien, on the border with Colombia, was the first diocese on dry land, erected by Pope Leo X with the bull of September 9, 1513. On August 15, 1519, Pedrarias Davila founded the city of Panama, which then developed into a commercial center and main port of trade. In 1524, the second Bishop of the diocese, Fray Vicente Peraza, moved the seat of the diocese in the new city of Panama. The city was destroyed by the Welsh pirate Henry John Morgan in 1671, but the Spanish refounded it three years later, about 8 km west of where it was founded the first time. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 15/5/2012)

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